

County of San Diego - Parks and Open Space Program

Contributing to the County of San Diego Strategic Plan Environment Initiative

"Promote natural resource management strategies that ensure environmental preservation, quality of life, and economic development"

Learn about our local Burrowing Owls

Page 3



East County MSCP Plan Update

Page 4

Avoid Invasive Non-Native Plants with this New Guide



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Photo taken by
Joseph M. DiTomaso



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For the past two and a half years, staff from the City of San Diego's Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) have worked with representatives from local California Native Plant Society (CNPS) and American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) chapters to create the ***San Diego County Invasive Ornamental Plant Guide***.

The purpose of the guide is to provide an educational tool for landscape professionals and the general public regarding the cultivation, selection, use and management of invasive plants in San Diego regional landscapes. The guide was formally presented to the public at a January 31, 2006 workshop with nearly 100 attendees from the landscape design profession and local agencies.

The guide is now available online through the ASLA website at <http://www.asla-sandiego.org/content/plantguide.html>. Within the matrix portion of the guide, each species listed is hyperlinked to a plant sheet with detailed information about the species and why it was included in the guide. The guide is intended to be a living document, so feedback is welcomed and can be sent to aslasd@att.net.

California Conservation Corps Helps Prepare Burned Preserves for the Public

*By Cailín Hunsaker, Supervising Park Ranger
Open Space Division, Department of Parks and Recreation*

In the span of a few dry days in October 2003, the dense vegetation in 11 Open Space Preserves were transformed to ash. The land suddenly looked like a moonscape. Soils lost their organic 'glue' in the heat of the fires, and were reduced to a fine, talcum powder-like consistency. Because the firestorms were so extensive, the federal government offered its resources

for assistance, which included the funding of California Conservation Corps (CCC) crews to help re-establish the preserves and their amenities for the public.

Cleanup started immediately with the clearing of dangerous debris from people's paths. Spot fires were doused, dead trees were cut, and thousands of feet of erosion control materials, like silt fence and straw wattle, were laid. Without vegetation to slow it down, rainwater and silt flowed without interruption to lower drainages. More than 20 miles of trails in the preserves were gutted in the ensuing rains of 2004 and 2005, and many were no longer safe enough to remain open.

(Continued on Page 2)



Large boulders were placed by hand to fill in in washed-out areas to rebuild trails.

(Continued from Page 1)

Step by constructed step, CCC crews helped County Parks and other affected agencies get back in business. At Mount Gower Open Space Preserve in Ramona, two crews rebuilt 2,200 linear feet of burned fence and created rock-lined water channels to direct rain flow. Another two crews installed a three-foot diameter culvert pipe, and reestablished a popular hiking trail over the top of it. One year after it was torched, this Preserve and its staging area were re-opened to the public.

At Hellhole Canyon Open Space Preserve in Valley Center, CCC crews also constructed water conduits where trails had dissolved in heavy rains. The biggest challenge was, and continues to be, collecting the materials needed for each project. Many of the trails are remote, and gathering boulders only works when it does not further denude the landscape. CCC crews, working with well trained and equipped Parks Staff, have used various techniques with grappling hooks, blasting, rock stretchers, ATVs, and old-fashioned body force to collect rocks from random areas, keeping the integrity of the slopes intact. Each of the larger rocks is placed by hand, secured one against the other, to line trenches, build wing walls on culverts and bridges, and fill gaps to prevent erosion. The daily routine of rock work is heavy, repetitive, and sometimes dangerous. With crews of 15 people, however, people watch out for each other and are able to accomplish significant tasks each day. Workers are aware of how to utilize materials around them, and try to avoid introducing anything unnatural to the environment.

In addition to rock construction, miles of trails have been rehabilitated for horses and hikers since 2004. Up to seven crew members at a time perform the graduated stages of trail maintenance, leading with Pulaski tools to chop out big obstacles, scraping the remains with hoes, and smoothing the trail tread with other hand tools. Benches have been replaced, new signs installed, and park patrons have expressed their appreciation as they hiked by the workers.

Two years after the disaster of 2003, only one preserve remains closed, the El Capitan Open Space Preserve. Some other preserves still have signs cautioning about a 'Trail Washout Ahead', but people are again able to recreate and enjoy their parks. One of the most interesting features now is watching the natural succession of plants and animals as they reestablish themselves in these barren areas. Without the CCCs and their heroic efforts with our reconstruction, the public would be much less well served by their local agencies. Every day of their work is appreciated by people who enjoy these facilities.



Volunteer CCC Crews carefully laid rocks and installed sandbags to line trenches and prevent erosion at Mount Gower Open Space Preserve in Ramona.



Highlighted MSCP Protected Species: Burrowing Owl



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The Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*) spends time underground. They take over the burrows of other small mammals such as prairie dogs and the California Ground Squirrel in grassland areas and open scrub. The Owls observe and survey for food from openings of the burrows and use another underground cavity for nesting. The Burrowing Owl consumes mostly insects and small animals, catching their prey by foraging and hovering in the air.

They breed from Central Mexico to Southern Canada. They were once very common in San Diego County, and historical observations trace population reduction over time. According to the San Diego County Bird Atlas, the owls used to perch alongside El Cajon Boulevard in street culvert drains in the early 1900's, before it was paved. Though once abundant in many regions of San Diego County, only a handful of breeding sites remain today.

The largest populations are found in East Otay Mesa and the North Island Naval Air Station on Coronado Island. Several nests can be found at the Otay Border Checkpoint and occasionally at the Tijuana Estuary. The Owls cover a large area when looking for food with sightings recorded at the Chula Vista Nature Center, Lake Hodges, Warner Valley, Borrego Valley and Ocotillo Wells, among other places. A portion of the few known locations of Burrowing Owl breeding habitat will be developed, placing the Burrowing Owl at an even greater risk of extirpation from San Diego County. The County is working with the Wildlife Agencies, property owners and the City of San Diego to create a plan that ensures the owl's conservation but allows for development to take place on the industrially designated lands on Otay Mesa.



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Trails Symposium held at Mission Trails Regional Park

Article by the County of San Diego
Department of Parks and Recreation



In January of 2005, the County Board of Supervisor approved a County Trails Program to achieve the goal of linking more than 1,000 miles of trail throughout the County, crossing many agency jurisdictions. On February 3, 2006, the County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation hosted a Trails Symposium at Mission Trails Regional Park to provide an update on the County Trails Program as well as provide an opportunity for the planners and stakeholders in the trail planning process to connect communities to the County's nine regional trails.

During the morning session, Paul Romero, Chief Deputy Director, California State Parks; Steve Musilami, Statewide Trails Manager, California State Parks; and Charlie Willard Retired Chief Office of

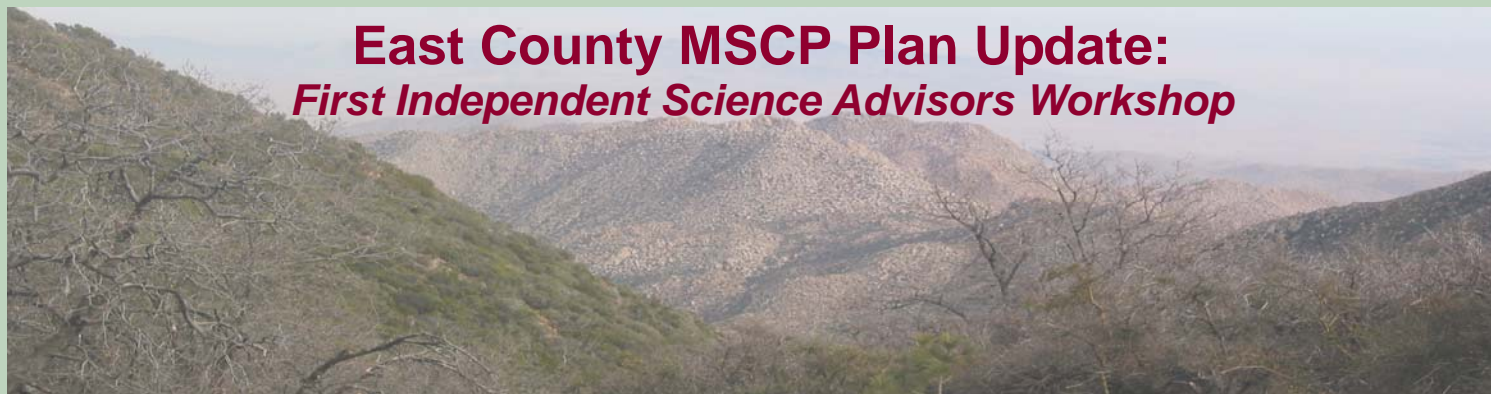
Grants and Local Services, California State Parks provided valuable insight and strategies for local, state and federal agency collaboration, the positive impact of trails on the economic health of a region, but also the wellness of its residents.

Their presentations set the tone for an energetic afternoon session, during which 65 people representing 40 public agencies and private organizations collaborated together reviewing maps of multi-use trails networks, discovering gaps and successfully identifying potential connections. Participants expressed their excitement about the project and enthusiastically committed to future participation in the trails effort that they hope will result in the public's ability to enjoy the beauty of northern, southern, eastern and western San Diego County, naturally!





East County MSCP Plan Update: *First Independent Science Advisors Workshop*



The East County MSCP Plan will be the County's third and final Habitat Conservation Plan. It is unique from the adopted South County MSCP Subarea Plan and the draft North County MSCP Plan in terms of the highly diverse species present and the low dwelling unit densities proposed within the Plan. The East County MSCP Study Area comprises over 1.5 million acres and is bounded on the west by Ramona and Palomar Mountain, on north by the Riverside County, and on the east predominantly by Imperial County, and the south by Mexico. A large portion of the Study Area contains public lands owned by California State Parks, Cleveland National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management. Privately owned parcels in the unincorporated are comprise approximately 418,930 acres (27%) of the Study Area. This smaller area is referred to as the Plan Area.

In August 2005, the County hired a consultant team that includes Technology Associates International Corporation (TAIC), Jones and Stokes and experts associated with the San Diego Natural History Museum. The San Diego Natural History Museum maintains comprehensive information on local biota and is a focal point for information on the natural history and ecology of San Diego County. The consultant team will assist the County with the preparation of a joint Natural Communities Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/HCP) and write the Environmental Impact Statement/Report for the East County MSCP Plan.

The Natural Community Conservation Planning Act (SB 107) requires "inclusion of independent scientific input to assist the department and plan participants..." in development of NCCPs. The role of Independent Science Advisors is to assure that highest scientific standards are applied to the planning process. The benefits of including such advice include improving the chances of a Plan's technical success and also increasing the credibility of the Plan for the public and stakeholders.

The East County MSCP Plan Project Team has been busy acquiring baseline data including species and vegetation locations, resource management status on public and private lands, and identification of areas of possible contiguity with other Habitat Conservation Plans. The Project Team held the first of two 2-day workshops with eight Independent Science Advisors on February 2-3, 2006. The Independent Science Advisors and their specialties are as follows:

Dr. Reed Noss is nationally recognized as one of the foremost experts on conservation of biodiversity and has authored several books on the subject.

Dr. Brian Foster is a local ornithologist. Dr. Foster's specialty is the study of rare and endangered birds in the San Diego region.

Drew Stokes is affiliated with the San Diego State University reserve system and USGS. Drew is well known in the region for performing innovative research in the San Diego region on bats.



East County MSCP Plan field tour to key areas around the County, including a stop at Lake Henshaw.

(Continued on Page 5)



Tom Oberbauer provided an East County MSCP Plan Area overview at a stop in Campo.



Drew Stokes gave a brief presentation on bats at a stop in Mt. Laguna.



Day 2 of Workshop - Project Team and Independent Science Advisors discussing the Plan.



San Diego Natural History Museum species experts provided presentations for the Advisors.

(Continued from Page 4)

Dr. Esther Rubin is affiliated with the Conservation Biology Institute. Dr. Rubin has been researching a population of 400 adult big horn sheep in Southern California in order to learn more about their habitat use and behavior. She is examining how habitat use and behavior influence social structure, as well as the ecological relationships between bighorn sheep and other large mammals, including mule deer and mountain lions.

Jeff Opdycke, Conservation Program Manager for the San Diego Zoo, works in the area of conservation of local resources. Jeff has a history of reviewing habitats from a regional perspective.

Dr. Kathy Williams is affiliated with San Diego State University. Dr. Williams primary interests include: insect/plant interactions; effects of food quality on insect population dynamics; insects as indicators of biodiversity and habitat restoration, riparian ecology, and the ecology of cicadas.

Dr. Paul Beier from Northern Arizona University is a noted researcher on the movements of large predators throughout Southern California. Dr. Beier has particular expertise in the area between the Palomar/ Agua Tibia Mountains and the Santa Ana Mountains.

Dr. Robert Fisher is affiliated with the San Diego State University reserve system and USGS. Dr. Fisher is well known in the region for performing groundbreaking research in the San Diego region on the utilization of habitats by reptiles and amphibians.

During the first workshop, the Independent Science Advisors were presented with information on the goals and structure of the planning process from the County and the consultant team. Representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game were also in attendance. This workshop included a review of the methodology, assumptions, and a discussion of the preliminary preserve design concepts for the Plan Area. The science advisors were taken on a tour within the East County MSCP Plan boundaries.

A report will be prepared summarizing this workshop that will concentrate on conservation planning principles, species coverage, and adaptive management. The second Independent Science Advisors workshop will be scheduled for later this year.



Department of Parks and Recreation Offers Volunteer Docent Naturalist Training

Starting on January 28 and running through April 1, 2006 the County of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department offered a Volunteer Docent Naturalist Training. This training is designed for people who want to volunteer as docents and hike and share information about the history and wildlife of our parks. The subjects presented to our docents include: reptiles and amphibians, geology tracking, mammals history of Wilderness Gardens, history of Hellhole Canyon and Valley Center, birds, plants and habitats, insects, the County's Multiple Species Conservation Program and CPR/ First Aid certification.

The County is especially looking for people to lead hikes in its Hellhole Canyon Open Space Preserve in Valley Center and its Wilderness Gardens Preserve in Pala.

The Wilderness Gardens Preserve is almost 700 acres and has been open since 1967 for hiking, and day use. The preserve is home to the original stone foundation of a grist mill. Historically, settlers came from all over the San Diego area to have their wheat or corn ground at this grist mill. Sometimes settlers would have to wait up to a week long for their wheat or corn to be ground.

The Hellhole Canyon Open Space Preserve has over 11 miles of trails for hikers and equestrians. Much of the preserve burned in the 2003 Paradise Fire and is undergoing a process of regrowth. Remains of the historic Escondido Canal are still visible. Sections of the canal on the west side are still in use and occasionally have flowing water.

For more information about the County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation's docent volunteer program or to volunteer, please visit www.sdparks.org or call Cheryl Wegner, volunteer coordinator, at 858-694-3042.

Hellhole Canyon Docent-Led Hikes



Docent-led hikes are held every 3rd Saturday at 9am at San Diego County's Hellhole Canyon Open Space Preserve. A County Ranger or volunteer Docent will guide you through the Preserve and highlight examples of some of the most healthy wildlife remaining in Southern California.

Hikers meet at 9 am in the parking lot trailhead off Kiavo and Santee Lanes. For directions visit the Friends of Hellhole website at www.hellholecanyon.org or call Friends of Hellhole Canyon at (760) 749-5320 or San Diego County Parks at (619) 956-4707.

Bring water, sturdy hiking shoes, binoculars, camera, hiking stick and lots of curiosity! Horse Hikes are organized semi-annually and are advertised in the Roadrunner and the Gazette.

Saturday, April 15, 2006 at 9 a.m. This docent-led hike will be focusing on native oak trees and characteristics of riparian habitat. Learn the mysteries of our regions magnificent oaks. Led by Docent Rick Landavazo.

Saturday, May 20, 2006 at 9 a.m. This docent-led hike will have a special emphasis on native chaparral led by a native plant specialist.



A Pioneer of the San Diego MSCP Retires



After 31 years, Bob Copper, Land Use Environment Group Deputy Chief Administrative Officer (DCAO), retired in March 2006. Bob played an integral role in guiding the Wildlife Agencies, landowners, environmental groups, the agricultural community and elected officials during the formation of the nationally recognized MSCP.

As Director of Parks and Recreation, he recognized the unique natural resource values of San Diego County and honed his skills at conserving lands. As the Acting Director for Planning and Land Use, he championed the cause of conservation and resource planning through the MSCP. Due to his dynamic management style, Bob was appointed DCAO in 1996 where he guided seven departments working collaboratively as the Land Use Environment Group. He has creatively and robustly led the way to establishing land use patterns that preserve sensitive lands and community character while accommodating future growth.

Through Bob's negotiation and coordination skills, tens of thousands of acres of land have been directly acquired and conserved for protection of its

valuable natural resources. Trends have been set into place to form San Diego County as an unprecedented example of an urbanized county with vigorous agricultural productivity and conservation protection plans that assure the survival of this regions unique combination of natural resources for generations to come.

Bob has been instrumental in placing San Diego County at the forefront nationally of innovative environmental and natural resource stewardship. Needless to say, we will miss Bob's untiring leadership and commitment to the planning and implementation of the MSCP.



Tom Oberbauer presented Bob Copper with a golden California Gnatcatcher Award for his vision and long-standing efforts and leadership on the County's MSCP.



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